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ABSTRACT

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) believed in the power of language to regulate society. Concerned about civil war and the moral and social decay of his time, he advocated a peaceful society with a mild and moderate form of law and order and with an emphasis on the well-being of individuals through compassion, kindness, and justice. This form of law consisted of learning a set of names and corresponding duties that became a social code. For him, language was a system of names of titles that gave a man his definite status in society and defined his relationship with others. Language learning was both the skill of applying the correct name to the reality of the situation and the motivation to act accordingly. Confucius concentrated on both filial and political names and inherent relationships. One was expected to know the duties and to fulfill them, to meet the standard and thereby earn the name. When the standard was not met, the title was stripped and the name was changed or rectified to fit the true situation. Thus a name reflected desired or abhorred attitudes, allowed or forbidden actions. Confucius believed that these rules and names had the power to regulate the lives of millions of people for thousands of years, and indeed they have pervaded every aspect of Chinese society, possibly because the system was backed by the ruling class and perpetuated the existing social structure, but most of all because of the code's inherent democracy. Confucianists accept such a code because it promotes their individual and social interest. (HOD)

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Confucius Say: Naming as Social Code in Ancient China

It is the job of philosophers, both Eastern and Western, classical and modern, to debate the nature of language. For some, language represents reality. For others, it causes knowledge. For some, it is persuasive. For others, it is expressive. But few philosophers deny the power of language. They know that with language, one group can define and enforce the behavior of another, less powerful group. For example, social institutions define culturally appropriate behavior and ostracize citizens who do not conform; legislatures and courts define lawful behavior and imprison constituents who do not obey; professors define scholarly behavior and flunk students who do not learn.

Likewise, it is the job of rhetoricians and philosophers to define just and virtuous behavior. Plato, for example, says rhetoricians must persuade their audiences to seek virtue. He tells Gorgias in their dialogue that the aim of a rhetorician is the "engendering of justice in the souls of his fellow citizens and the eradication of injustice, the planting of self-control and the uprooting of uncontrol, the entrance of virtue and the exit of vice" (79).

Similarly, Confucius, an ancient Chinese philosopher, also believes in the power of language to regulate society. For him, language is didactic. He espouses a "practical moral philosophy that [defines] the rules of personal cultivation and the virtues of human relationship." His aim is to teach and

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influence people to be good (Liu 4-5). Concerned about civil war and the moral and social decay of his time, Confucius advocates a peaceful society with a "mild and moderate form of law and order [and] a great concern and emphasis on the well being of individuals through compassion, kindness and justice" (Kim 52). This mild form of law consists of the learning of a set of names and corresponding duties that become a social code. If the people learn the names and act accordingly, there is peace and prosperity. The world once again returns to harmony.

As the Orient's most influential teacher, Confucius is able to "engender justice" not only in the hearts of his contemporaries, but also in the millions of souls alive during the thousands of years of Chinese history since. In order to understand this power of language, we must first examine Confucius' social code and what behaviors it defines; and then we must question its adoption as a political and social institution and how it asserts power over the masses.

Confucius' social code

Confucius lived from 551-479 BC during the Chou dynasty, which ruled from the twelfth to the third century BC and governed an Iron Age agrarian society based on feudal landholdings. He is credited with five of the earliest works of literary Chinese called the Confucian books. However, his most important work is the Analects, which describe his social code. His two greatest disciples are Mencius and Hsun Tzu, representatives of opposing sects of Confucianism. Mencius, 371 to 289? BC, is famous for his political debates and is considered the father of Chinese democracy. His writings are collected in The Book of Mencius. Hsun-Tzu, 360--230 BC, developed Chinese psychology and logic. He wrote several essays, which are collected in a book bearing his name. Both revitalize Confucianism at a time of political chaos in their kingdoms; however,

there are differences in their beliefs. One important difference is their view of the nature of man. While Mencius believes man is innately good and naturally follows good models, Hsun-Tzu believes man is inherently evil and requires social regulation.

Confucius lived during what is often called the Period of the Warring States because the Chinese feudal states frequently attacked each other in hopes of gaining more territory. Consequently, it was a time of social, political, economic and moral chaos. The overriding philosophical question of the time was "How can we live in peace?" Nevertheless, the Chinese believed that this disharmony was only temporary. Ancient Chinese political states derived their authority from religious beliefs. The early Chinese kings ruled under a mandate from the Son of Heaven: according to Mencius, only Heaven had the right to name a successor to a throne (Mencius 354). Indeed, because "no one conceived of the existence of states that were independent of the Son of Heaven and not subordinate to him. . .political fragmentation seem[ed] an anomaly," a temporary break from the natural order of things (Rubin 2).

Confucius, in particular, believes that this disharmony will not last long because harmony existed in the early Chou dynasty and he needs only to recreate that time. It is his conviction that "the highest possibilities of human experience had already been achieved within the known past and that the hope of the future was to recapture this lost splendor." According to Sinologist Schwartz, Confucius' idolization of this era is a mixture of both the real (it was indeed a time of peace and prosperity) and the ideal. He is deluded by the concept of the ideal socio-politico-cultural order in traditional sacred literature. This set of rules, universal and absolute, are part of the mandate from Heaven called in Chinese <u>tao</u> [<u>way</u> or <u>road</u>]. Confucius insists he did not

create these rules but rather merely transmits them to his disciples. Nevertheless, because this ideal exists not only in his collective but also in his historical experience, he firmly believes harmony will someday return (Schwartz 63-65). Therefore, Confucius, as well as classical Eastern philosophers, concern themselves with social order, not epistemology as their Western counterparts do. As a member of the ruling class, he is concerned that a "harmony and synthesis of doctrine and institution [that is, of ideology and actual behavior] be maintained" (Wright 3-5).

Confucius believes that the chaos of his time results from the erosion of the state. Despite their titles, the nobles and ministers do not fulfill their responsibilities as rulers. He feels they are not only obligated to administer, but more importantly, to set good examples (Hsu 44). Confucius "attributed to the ruler the highest degree of moral responsibility so as to set up a moral example for all those beneath him" because he says good models are the only way to educate the illiterate masses (Confucianism 45) and because model rulers are the only means to ensuring a "government by virtue rather than force" (Schwartz 110). He warns that if the rulers do not return to the kingly tao, they will destroy their dynasties within several generations (Fung 59). The chaos of Confucius' time results because the officials do not assume their responsibilities in accord with their titles: they do not administer properly or set a good moral example.

This chaos, according to Confucian theory, is the natural consequence of a gap between ideology and actual behavior, of social disharmony. When the ruler does not rule, the people have no model and thus become confused and the state has no ministers and thus ceases to function. Certain responsibilities are expected of men in titular positions, but when they are not carried out, both

the man and the title can not be trusted. Hsun-Tzu discusses at length the results of not fulfilling the duties of one's position: to fail in one's duties, "thus confusing the correct nomenclature, would cause the people to be in doubt and bring about much litigation; therefore this was called 'great wickedness.'" In other words, he continues, if both responsible and corrupt rulers hold the same positions, then "noble and base are not differentiated. . . .In this situation, there would certainly be the danger of the people's ideas not being understood and their affairs being hindered and forsaken" (qtd. in The Sacred Books of Confucius and Other Confucian Classics 266-267).

Confucius believes the only means to restoring order is the restructuring of the system so that the Emperor, his nobles and ministers fulfill their duties as rulers and the common people theirs as subjects; that is, to persuade all to once again follow the tao. Then all will be assured that the rulers will set good examples. Their title will then correspond to their behavior. When the names accord, the world will be in order (Fung 59). Indeed, Confucianism stresses "that every man must be in his proper place and with his proper responsibilities and duties. . . .if every man knows his duty and acts according to his duty, social order will be secured (Scared Books 15).

Language learning

This belief in the bond between words and behaviors is not unlike the approach to language and language learning the modern schema theorists take. These theorists say that concepts are learned and stored in memory in the form of schemata, or in Minsky's terms, frames. They are a network of features recalled from memory when encountering a situation we need to understand. The top level in the structure consists of obligatory variables, that is, inherent features. The second level is made up of optional variables that get assigned

values corresponding to the details of the situation at hand. And finally, the third level contains deviant features that signal the possible need for the instantiation, or calling forth, of a new schema. The schemata are arranged hierarchially so that at the same time they contain smaller, more specific concepts and are part of broader, more abstract schemata (Minsky; Schallert).

Take, for example, the English-speakers' concept of book. To us, book is a collection of words printed on equal-sized pages and bound together along one edge, usually with protective covers. We would probably agree that these are obligatory features--without them, we would not have a book. However, books may come in various sizes, colors, thicknesses, and shapes. These features are variable. Now suppose that we went to a convention of avant-garde printers who experimented with book forms. We may see books there that look to us more like tapestries, for example. Then we would have to consider whether the object before us was indeed a book or whether we had to call forth our tapestry schema. Regardless, book is part of the broader schema of printed media and contains the more specific schemata of index and table of contents.

However, our schemata are more than mere lists of adjectives; they include verbs and nouns: they do more than just describe; they tell us how to act and feel toward a book. For example, we generally know to open a book to the left and read its pages from left to right, top to bottom. We treat books with care: we do not leave them out in the rain or spill coffee on them. We have a certain reverence for books. In general, we confidently believe what we read because books have better memories than we do and because they contain more facts than we do. Therefore, schema theorists say, when we learn a concept, we learn not only its definition, but also a set of behaviors and attitudes that accompany it. However, they do not deal adequately with the strength of the obligation to

follow these behaviors. That we recognize deviant variables (using a book as a skate board, for example) clearly implies we distinguish "right" behaviors and attitudes from "wrong" ones. But that deviancy itself exists equally clearly implies that the "right" is not always practiced.

Such is not the case for Confucius. For him, concepts have compulsive behaviors. He feels that the learning of concepts is the learning of definitions and their accompanying behaviors and attitudes. For him, language is a system of names, of "title[s] that give a man his definite status in society and define his relationships with others." It is necessarily an "objective standard" by which to measure how well one behaved "in accordance with what the name of one's position implies" (Confucianism 44-45). Language learning for Confucius, then, is both the skill of applying the correct name to the reality of the situation and the motivation to act accordingly. To him, the function of words is to "engender and express attitudes with implications for action." He is not concerned so much with the truth of a proposition as he is with its behavioral implications (Hansen 59-65). Confucius concentrates on both filial and political names and inherent relationships: father/son, older brother/younger brother, great man/small man, king/subject. Thus, for each of these relationships, there is a set of duties that one has to the other. One is expected to know the duties and to fulfill them, to meet the standard and thereby earn the name.

Rectification of Names

However, as in the time of Confucius, names do not always correspond to behaviors: a king may not act kingly, a brother may not act brotherly. In these cases, the standard is not met, so the title is stripped and the name changed to fit the true situation. These changes follow the Doctrine of the Rectification

of Names because it is the names that are rectified to fit reality. The writings of Confucius, Mencius and Hsun-Tzu give many instances of such changes. For example, in his historical account of his kingdom, Confucius records many killings. Some are called "assassinations" because kings were killed while others are called "murders" because common men were killed. More specifically, Confucius recounts a battle between a man named Tuan and the Earl of Cheng. Tuan attacked the Earl but was captured and sentenced to death. Confucius intentionally omits two important details: that Tuan and the earl are brothers and that Tuan later escapes and is never punished. These omissions exemplify the social code. According to tao, a younger brother does not attack his elder brother and an elder brother does not seek his younger brother's death in revenge (from this case, it seems that intention is just as evil as action). Because they do not act brotherly, they do not deserve the title of "brother" and therefore lose it (Hansen 74).

Similarly, Mencius comments on the assassination of a wicked king named Chau. He says that a king who does not rule wisely cannot be called a king:

> He who outrages the benevolence proper to his nature, is called a robber; he who outrages righteousness, is called a ruffian. The robber and ruffian we call a mere fellow. I have heard of the cutting off of the fellow Chau, but I have not heard of the putting a sovereign to death, in his case (167).

Thus, while the assassination of a king is not permitted under the Confucian code, the murder of a tyrant is justified. Similarly, it is not lawful to kill a gentleman, but a thief does not deserve the name gentleman. Therefore, punishing a thief by death is justified (qtd. in Hansen 75-76).

Names are rectified for two reasons. One is that rectification brings harmony and social order because ideology and actual behavior reflect each other. The other more important reason is that it establishes a moral code for the masses to internalize. The naming system divides the universe into portions. Each portion is a continuum of attitudes and actions. At some point along this continuum--recognized as arbitrary but nonetheless conventional--positive and negative values are assigned. Thus a name reflects desired or abhorred attitudes, allowed or forbidden actions. Because a name has a corresponding opposite, only one name can apply at a time, Confucius says. Forbidding "simultaneous applicability" avoids conflicts between rules. A hierarchy of names is established, and this hierarchy reflects moral judgments (Hansen 75-76). The example of the two brothers implicitly sets out for the followers of Confucius the morality of that situation. Likewise they learn how punishment is meted out. The name common man takes precedence over king and thief over gentleman. The family is valued over the state; thus a son owes more loyalty to his father than to his governor. When told about a son who reported his father for stealing sheep, Confucius chastises the son. He says "uprightness" is found in a situation in which "the father conceals the misconduct of the son and the son conceals the misconduct of the father" (41). Finally, expediency is valued over social custom. Mencius said "He who would not so rescue [a] drowning woman is a wolf. For males and females not to allow their hands to touch in giving and receiving is the general rule; when a sister-in-law is drowning, to rescue her with the hand is a peculiar exigency" (307).

Institutionalization of the Code

Confucius' strict social code depends on the "emotional malleability of people" (Hansen 77). It is based on the assumption that once people learn the names, they feel the correct attitudes and conform to the traditional behavior. And when the names are rectified, the people change accordingly. Why do the people accept a system that seems to manipulate them? Why do they allow it to exert such power over them?

Undoubtedly the answer is very complex, but Confucianists themselves and scholars speculate on the answer. Rubin and Schwartz both agree that Confucianism gained social legitimacy because it had the backing of the ruling class. Confucius and other philosophers served as advisers to the courts of their day. Quite naturally, court officials were pleased with a strict code that required obedience of their subjects. In fact, Confucianism was chosen as the state religion because it stresses submissiveness to traditional beliefs and behaviors (Rubin 17; Schwartz 71).

Secondly, Schwartz also implies Confucius' code is popular because it perpetuates the existing social structure. Confucianism restates the traditional tao, which both describes familial relationships and extends its concepts to the state. These political hierarchies are modeled after familial ones: Confucius sees the state as one large family. Therefore, the social code already in place within the family was easily adapted to the state. He says that "It is in the family that one learns how to exercise authority and how to submit to authority. . .The family is ideally the first school of virtue and the source of those values which makes possible the good society" (Schwartz 100). Unlike Western philosophers, who view the family as a burden to the public mission of a man, Confucius exaults the family and its traditionally strong ties.

Thirdly, the Confucianists believe in the educability of men. The basis of Mencius' philosophy is the innate goodness of men. Because they are good, they naturally possess an ability to do good. If, however, they fail, they recover their inherent goodness through learning and imitating good models. He says the "tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. . . .If men do what is not good, the blame cannot be imputed to their natural powers" (395-6, 402). Hsun-Tzu, on the other hand, believes that men are innately evil but that they can be rescued from their evil ways by dogmatically obeying those in authority. He insists that "by nature a man does not originally possess propriety and righteousness; hence he makes strong effort to learn and seeks to have them" (131). Therefore, the Confucianists believe in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. This idea apparently is unique to Confucius because during his time, men were pragmatically educated to assume ministerial positions. Education is so important that Mencius calls for the governmental establishment of schools for all classes of citizens: "Establish . . .educational institutions--for the instruction of the people" (242).

However, the most convincing argument lies in the code's inherent democracy. The people accept such a code because it promotes their individual and social interest. The Confucian code is more than merely a subduing force. In actuality, the ancient Chinese citizens had more power than it seems on the surface. Because the feudal states were relatively small, the people knew each other and the relationship between the nobles and ministers and their subjects was personal. The Chinese term for these states was guo jia, literally state-family (Rubin 2-3).

Moreover, the Confucianists advocate a humane government. Confucius rejects the institutional superiority of the ruling class. He feels that laws

are not necessary to improve society; a government should control by virtue and not force. The only condition needed is the good example set by the leaders. In the Analects, he says

> Lead the people with governmental measures and regulate them by law and punishment, and they will avoid wrong doing but will have no sense of honor and shame. Lead them with virtue and regulate them by the rules of propriety, and they will have a sense of shame, and moreover, set themselves right. (22)

In addition, Mencius, the father of Chinese democracy, describes the benevolent government in his writings. He says

> If [one] will indeed dispense a benevolent government to the people, being sparing in the use of punishments and fines, and making the taxes and levies light, so causing that the fields shall be ploughed deep, and the weeding of them be carefully attened to, and that the strong-bodied, during their days of leisure, shall cultivate their filial piety, fraternal respectfulness, sincerity, and truthfulness, serving thereby, at home, their fathers and elder brothers, and, abroad, their elders and superiors. (135)

Mencius argues that when a government takes care not only of the spiritual needs of the people (through good role models from the rulers) but also their physical and mental needs (through jobs and schools), the Confucian code--that is, social order--prevails.

Thus, from these descriptions of good government, one can see that the Confucian social code is not merely a code of subordination. Rather it is one of reciprocity. His code of obedience tempered by one of civil disobedience. In the code of names, revolution is justified. If the king is a tyrant, he may

be disposed. Likewise, his definition of gentleman or great man, a man of noble character, is one who follows the just commands of his ruler and resists the corrupt ones. Confucius says a gentleman has the courage to sacrifice his life before he sacrifices his virtue to power. Therefore, rulers are accountable to their constituents. The Mandate from Heaven reflects the will of the people, who are its voice. Mencius says that "heaven sees according as my people see; Heaven hears according as my people hear" (357). Confucius says that "without the trust of the people, the state cannot survive" (qtd. in Rubin 3). This obligation of one class to another is what allows the state to function. Confucius believes that if each man lives up to his repsonsibilities in society, then all will live in peace and harmony. Only then will music and art and other learning flourish. In order to define these responsibilities, Confucius developed an elaborate code of names and corresponding attitudes and behaviors. When the Chinese learn a name, they know how they should feel and act toward the person named but also what behaviors they can expect from him. With this code, the people have a fixed set of rules to live by. These rules, these names had the power to regulate the lives of millions of people for thousands of years. Indeed, they have "molded the Chinese national character and pervaded every aspect of Chinese society" (Liu 4).

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